

The Alsop House  
Middletown, Connecticut

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Connecticut

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Harold H. Davis, District Officer  
29 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

THE ALSOP HOUSE  
Middletown, Connecticut

The Alsop House on High Street in Middletown, Connecticut, ~~The house~~ is unique for the many fine frescoes which adorn the walls and ceilings. These frescoes are of superior execution, classical inspiration, fine rich color and the excellent drawing and decorative quality and mark the end of our historic fresco period.

They are distinctly Pompeian in style, but as a whole are more subdued<sup>than Pompeian frescoes.</sup> Gods, goddesses, dancing girls and cupids, with the usual classical accompaniment of birds and flowers, are used throughout.

The house was built in 1838-39 by Richard Alsop, who died before it was completed. His widow, a French woman, completed it, and the furnishings and decorations are of the prevalent Empire style.

The walls were not decorated until after the furniture had been installed. It is believed that the Italian artist Constantino Brumidi who did the frescos at the National Capitol, did those in the Alsop House. If so, the decorations were painted between 1849 and 1852.

The house is a large two story structure, with walls covered with a light pinkish brown roughcast. The nearly flat roof with wide projecting eaves, the wings and piers, give it ~~some~~<sup>a</sup> resemblance to an Italian villa. A

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unique feature of the façade consists of three white classic female figures each painted within an arched panel representing a niche. Between the two central windows in one of these panels stands a figure of Erato with her Lyre painted to represent a white marble statue. On the left wing is a smaller figure of Juno beneath a large urn, while on the right wing stands a figure of Victory with a wreath in her hand, also beneath an urn. Just under the eaves there is a wide frieze, covered with scroll figures in shades of brown on a cream background.

The entrance is through a small vestibule on the right. At the foot of the wall opposite the doorway painted to represent an open marble colonnade with clinging vines through which can be seen sky and clouds, stands a pictured red flower pot with a plant. From the vestibule the hall extends through the center of the house and to the upper story and is lighted by a glass dome in the roof. The walls, pinkish cream and grey in tone, are lined off like stonework with large panels and a festooned frieze in sections.

This treatment extends into the upper hall, the staircase wall having female figures about six feet high in painted niches, as on the façade, one of which is an exact copy of one of Canova's dancing girls. From the hall open the double parlors, separated by a wide arch; the dining room, originally only half its present size, <sup>with</sup> its frescoed

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medallions of fruit and flowers; and a small room whose walls are painted to represent open arches through which can be seen sky and clouds with birds and flowers. (For a more complete description of the frescoes you are referred to "Early American Wall Paintings" by Edward B. Allen, published by the Yale University Press.)

An interesting fact is that the frescoes were painted on the plaster with tempera, the side walls being also treated with a preparation which preserved the paint to such an extent that the wall paper, which for many years covered the frescoes, was taken off without injury to them and also allowed the accumulated dust and smoke to be removed. The ceilings were not so protected but they were never covered with paper.

Sources: "Early American Wall Paintings", Edward B. Allen, Pages 101 to 110 inclusive.

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*Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.*